



1101 Connecticut Ave., NW, Ste. 330 · Washington, DC 20036
tel (202) 736-2200 · fax (202) 736-2222
www.campaignlegalcenter.org

November 20, 2003

VIA Electronic Filing

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W., TW-A325
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: **In the Matter of Public Interest Obligations of TV Broadcast Licensees,
Notice of Inquiry, MM Dkt No. 99-360 (Dec. 1999)
Second Periodic Review of the Commission's Rules and Policies Affecting the
Conversion to Digital Television, MB Dkt No. 03-15, MM Dkt. Nos. 99-360,00-
167, 00-168 (Jan. 2003)
2002 Biennial Regulatory Review – Review of the Commission's Broadcast
Ownership Rules and Other Rules Adopted Pursuant to Section 202 of the
Telecommunications Act of 1996, MB Docket No. 02-277
Cross-Ownership of Broadcast Stations and Newspapers, MM Docket No. 01-
235
Rules and Policies Concerning Multiple Ownership of Radio Broadcast
Stations in Local Markets, MM Docket No. 01-317
Definition of Radio Markets, MM Docket No. 00-244
Definition of Radio Markets for Areas Not Located in an Arbitron Survey
Area, MB Docket No. 03-130**

Dear Ms. Dortch:

Pursuant to Section 1.1206(b) of the Commission's Rules, this letter is to provide notice of an *ex parte* meeting in the above-referenced proceedings. On November 19, 2003, Amy Wolverton, Associate Legal Counsel and Media Program Director of the Campaign Legal Center (CLC), and Kelly Ann Booth, legal intern at CLC, met with Jonathan Cody, Special Policy Advisor to Chairman Michael K. Powell.

During this meeting, Ms. Wolverton highlighted CLC's concern with the continual decline in the amount of broadcast news coverage of campaign and election issues, particularly in recent years. For example, the average nightly national network television coverage dropped 71.6% from 1996 to 2002, and the network evening news coverage of the 2002 presidential campaign dropped 33% over the same time period. Additionally, from 1968 to 2000 the average length of presidential candidate sound bites on network evening news dropped 83 percent from 1968 to 2000. (Supporting charts and

study links are attached). Consequently, Ms. Wolverton stressed the need for the Commission to ensure that media outlets provide candidate access and political discourse programming, especially in light of relaxed ownership restrictions.

While recognizing that some networks are promising to address upcoming elections, she urged the Chairman to formally challenge broadcast and cable entities to voluntarily increase coverage of campaign and election issues. In support, Ms. Wolverton noted the success of a voluntary coverage program in 2000. With only one-third of studied stations agreeing to air five minutes of political coverage each night proceeding an election, coverage was 79.19% percent higher in 2000 than in 2002 when no commitments were made. Also, in April of 2002, Chairman Powell issued a similar challenge to several industries in an effort to advance the transition to digital television. He asked for networks to create more compelling content, equipment makers to produce better television sets, and for all involved to increase consumer accessibility. Virtually every industry embraced the plan, and the FCC has proudly reported that the transition was moving forward. Likewise, a challenge from the Chairman for political discourse coverage could meet with the same success.

In addition to discussing political broadcasting coverage, Ms. Wolverton also recommended that the Commission complete its open rulemaking on the public interest obligations of digital broadcasters. Finally, with regard to the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, Ms. Wolverton urged that the Commission move to quickly implement BCRA's political broadcasting provisions, including providing broadcasters the tools and guidance necessary to ensure full and fair public disclosure regarding political advertising in time for the 2004 election cycle.

Pursuant to the Commission's Rules, this *ex parte* notice is being filed electronically through the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System procedures. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202-736-2200 should you have any questions regarding this filing.

Sincerely,

/s/

Amy R. Wolverton

Attachments

cc: Jon Cody